

VZCZCXYZ0002
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHSF #0078 0320841
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 010841Z FEB 10
FM AMEMBASSY SOFIA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6673

UNCLAS SOFIA 000078

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [ELAB](#) [EIND](#) [ETRD](#) [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#)

SUBJECT: BULGARIA: CHILD LABOR REPORT

REF: A. SECSTATE 131997

¶1. (U) In response to reftel, U.S. Embassy Sofia contacted the Government's Labor Inspectorate which reported no cases of child exploitation in the production of goods in the formal economy. The Inspectorate agreed with NGOs' assessment that what forced child labor existed was in the gray economy and consisted of forced begging, pick pocketing, dumpster-diving, distribution of narcotics, and prostitution. This appears to be particularly common among children of Roma origin. In rural areas, children are also involved in agriculture to help their families.

¶2. (U) NGOs including the Institute for Social Activities and Practices, International Social Services Bulgaria, and Ekip, noted a lack of reliable statistics and analysis on the magnitude of forced child labor in Bulgaria. Despite the lack of statistics, according to the local coordinator of an International Labor Organization project, the amount of forced child labor in the production of goods is not significant. NGOs reported that child labor laws are generally enforced well, but highlighted that the gray economy fall outside the authority of the Labor Inspectorate. They also assessed positively the increased capacity of social workers to assist children and their ability to refer child victims of exploitive labor practices to six state-run shelters throughout the country.

¶3. (U) Representatives of the Government's Labor Inspectorate reported a decline in child labor in 2009, which they attributed to the overall rise in unemployment as a result of the financial crisis. The Inspectorate granted a total of 2,765 requests for employment of children between 16 and 18 years in 2009, compared to 5,807 in 2008. The majority concerned employment in the service industry. In 2009, the Inspectorate issued a limited number of work permits for underage workers employed in the production of goods. All of the cases involved students who sought employment as seamstresses to complement their vocational training.

¶4. (U) The Inspectorate noted increased awareness among employers and improved compliance with the work permit requirements in the formal economy. According to the Inspectorate, the harsh fines of up to BGN 15,000 (approximately USD 11,200) and possible criminal charges explained the fall in the number of violations. In 2009, the Inspectorate referred 58 cases of unlicensed, underage workers to the Prosecution Service, compared to 194 in 2008. All of these reports were related to children working without a permit in the service industry. The Inspectorate also found 120 other violations of child labor laws, primarily involving failure to provide protective uniforms, compared to 365 such violations in 2008.

WARLICK